

History of
HEEREN BROTHERS COMPANY
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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History of
HEEREN BROTHERS COMPANY
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

(Designers and manufacturers of tokens, medals, badges, emblems, jewelry, trophies and related items; distributor of diamonds, watches, clocks and optical items; and artisans in precious metals and stones.)

If you have a storecard, medal, badge or decoration made in Pittsburgh over a generation or so ago chances are good that it was designed and manufactured by Heeren Brothers Company - a firm no longer in the business but once the largest of its kind in the country. Since thousands of numismatic pieces were produced by the firm and since it was essentially a family business it is felt desirable to record its history before the ravages of time obscure what few records remain.

Some of the beautifully designed pieces are shown at the right. The top Lincoln piece, for example, (King No) is bi-metallic, being copper and aluminum, issued in 1909, for the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth.

These and thousands of other pieces originated in Pittsburgh in the Heeren Brothers Company.

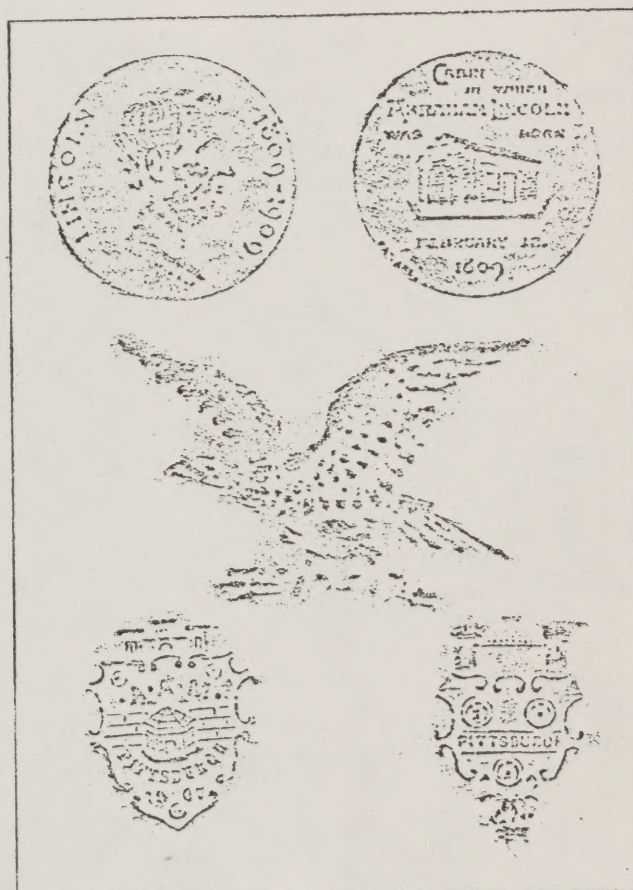
This is the story of that company from its origination in 1862 to its demise as an active business of numismatic interest in 1934 - a period of 72 years - almost three quarters of a century.

THE FOUNDER

William F. Heeren, born in Eggen, Germany on August 8, 1841 and educated in the public schools of that country, came to the United States in 1860, just before the outbreak of the Civil War and when he was but 19 years old. He resided in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for two years before moving to Pittsburgh in 1862.

HEEREN & WECKERLE (Partnership 1862 - 1870)

Mr Heeren formed a partnership with his brother-in-law Mr. Carl Weckerle who died shortly afterward. "Heeren & Weckerle founded a jewelry business in an establishment located in what is now (1929) an alley running from Fifth Avenue to Diamond Street almost directly opposite the First National Bank building" says a portion of a mimeographed sheet pasted in an old scrapbook. It goes on to say "The partners had no safe; therefore, Mr. Heeren, who was in charge of the factory took the gold and silver home with him at nights in a cigar box". This may be further

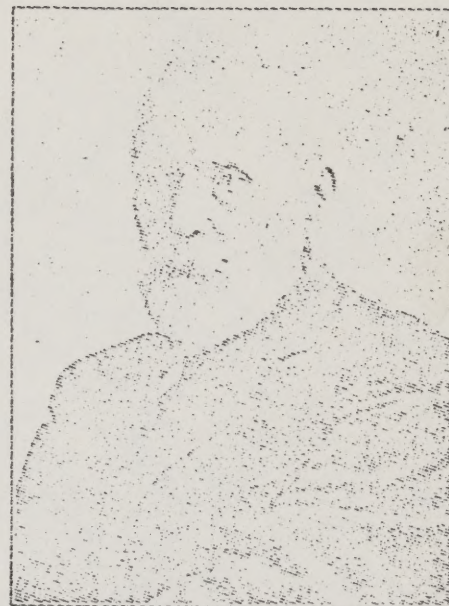


Some Heeren Designs

explained by the fact that their quarters were upstairs over Piatt's saloon. The business must have been intermittent and shakey in the early days because later advertisements refer to the beginning of "Business service to the jewelry industry" as being in 1867.

HEEREN BROTHERS COMPANY (Partnership 1870-1874)

In 1870 Mr. Heeren formed a partnership with his brother Otto. An employee hired in 1871 was a Mr. William F. Hoffman, then nineteen years old, who was destined to become a partner, driving force behind the expansion of the business, and president of the firm. No doubt a consideration at the time of his employment was the fact that he was Mrs. Otto Heeren's brother.



William F. Heeren
Founder

HEEREN BROTHERS & CO. (Partnership 1874 - 1919)

In 1874 William and Otto Heeren took William Hoffman into the partnership which was then operated as Heeren Brothers & Co. Some numismatic records of this period are still in existence.

STYLE BOOK SURVIVES

A badly deteriorated paper-backed book on whose brittle pages are pasted faded penciled drawings of medal, decoration and badge designs is now in the Carnegie Museum, Section of Coins and Medals. It contains 1,534 sketches of ideas, many of which are noted in handwriting; "Made". Others not so marked did result in issued pieces, and still others are recognizable as portions of other finished pieces. An example of one of the more distinct drawings is shown to the left.



One of 1534 drawings
in the old sketch book

Some of the pieces of this period are of unusual numismatic interest. There were far too many to describe them all here but a few were as follows:

STEPHEN FOSTER MEDALS (1878)

In 1878 there was a movement to purchase and preserve the Pittsburgh home of Stephen Collins Foster, the famous composer. The first medals struck for the Stephen Foster Memorial Home were made by Heeren Brothers & Co. in the old Pittsburgh Exposition, where a Foster admirer paid \$10.00 for the first medal. Subsequent medals sold for 25¢, the money being used to purchase the Foster home.

BISMARCK WREATH

An iron wreath in honor of the "Iron Chancellor" Bismark (1815-1898) was made by the company and sent to Germany as a token of esteem by the German Americans of Pittsburgh.

G.A.R. CANNON BADGES (1894)

When the Grand Army of the Republic wanted a new idea for badges for delegates to their annual convention in 1894 the Heeren company suggested that the badges be made from bronze cannons fired in the war by both the Northern and Southern armies. The War Department agreed and the two cannons were shipped to Pittsburgh and rolled out together.

"We made hundreds of badges and there was still plenty of the metal left" recalled Mr. Heeren in 1933. "We made some watch charms and there was still plenty. Then we made a replica of one of the original cannons. It was in the Carnegie Museum for a long time and is now (1933) one of the displays in Memorial Hall (Soldiers and Sailors Memorial in Oakland). For awhile we had cannons to the right of us, cannons to the left of us..."

HEEREN BROS. CO. (Corporation 1919 -)

It being desired to recognize the loyalty of some of the men identified with the firm and give them an interest in the business, the partnership was dissolved in 1919 and a corporation was formed. Mr. William Heeren was elected Chairman of the board of directors and Mr. William Hoffman became President of the company.

PRESSED FLOWERS AND STREET CAR BADGES

Mr. William Heeren was the inventor of a patented badge for street car and railway men. He also, incidentally, was the inventor of a process by means of which flowers can be pressed so as to retain their color and fragrance.

Through sales of the patented celluloid badges, also used by firemen and policemen, the firm became one of the first American business houses to open trade relations with South American cities and did an extensive business in South America, Mexico, Egypt, Portugal and many other foreign countries.

OTHER PRODUCTS

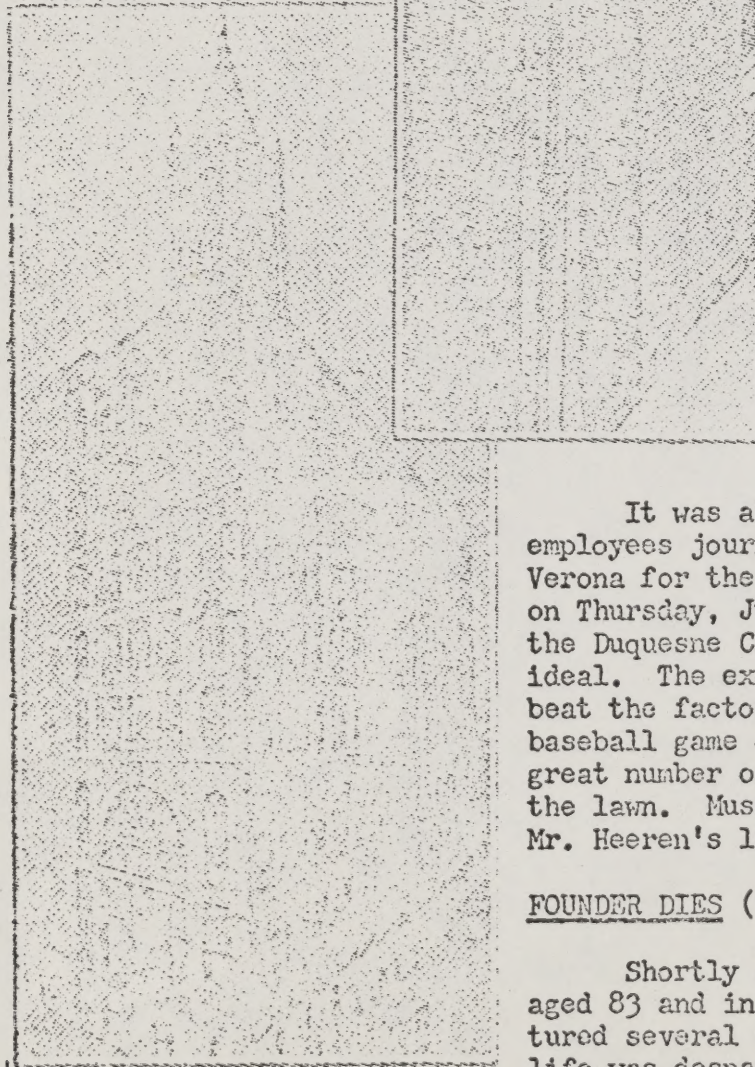
While the company may be best known for its medals and badges, it also became famous for its jewelry, trophies, school rings pins and emblems, watches, clocks, diamonds, fraternity items, silverware, charms, watch fobs, loving cups, memorials, lodge jewels, pens, pencils, plating, optical items, tools, engraving, enameling, stonecutting, athletic awards, military insignae, silversmithing, and excellent workmanship of distinctive design.

They also remodeled old jewelry. They considered themselves "manufacturing jewelers" but they also served as distributors of some of the above items that they did not make themselves.



Quarters
in 1862
over
Piatt's
Soloon

Quarters in 1924



FOUNDER RETIRES (1920)

In 1920 Mr. William Heeren retired from active participation in the business relinquishing the reins to Mr. Hoffman. Mr. Heeren could certainly look back on a lifetime of accomplishment. A vivid example of the progress of the firm is shown in the contrast of its first quarters over Piatt's saloon to its own eight story building at the corner of Eighth St. and Penn Avenue.

A MEMORABLE YEAR (1924)

Mr. Hoffman, the last of the "old guard" of the Heeren Bros. Co., relinquished the Presidency in 1924 but remained as a member of the board of directors. By this time his two sons, William and Herman, were vice presidents of manufacturing and operations respectively. Mr. Heeren's son Walter was also with the firm.

In 1924 Heeren Bros. Co. was the largest and best-equipped business of its kind between New York and Chicago.

It was also this year that 100 of its employees journeyed up the Allegheny river to Verona for the annual company picnic. It was on Thursday, June 19. The exact location was the Duquesne Canoe Club. The weather was ideal. The executive and sales departments beat the factory workers in a hard-fought baseball game - their first victory in a great number of years. Supper was served on the lawn. Music and dancing followed. It was Mr. Heeren's last festivity.

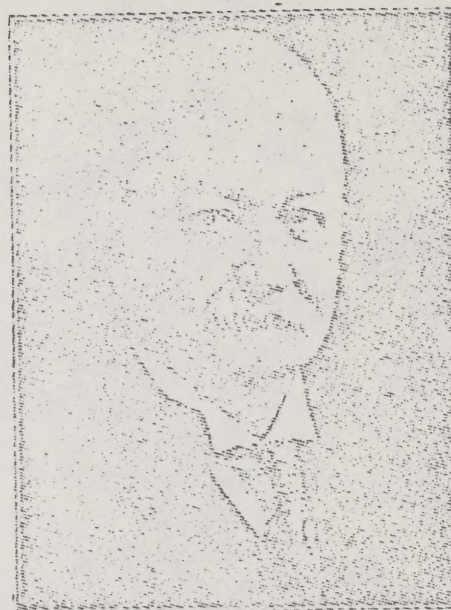
FOUNDER DIES (1924)

Shortly after the picnic Mr. Heeren, now aged 83 and in failing health, fell and fractured several of his ribs. At that time his life was despaired of but he rallied, appear-

ing one day at the store rether unexpectedly. He continued to go to his office until mid-December when he became seriously ill and never recovered. He died December 17, 1924 at his home, 4733 Center Avenue which he shared with his son Walter, and was buried in Allegheny Cemetery. So passed a fine artist, business man and benefactor.

W.F.HOFFMAN DIES (1927)

Until 1927 Mr. Hoffman, retired President served in an advisory capacity. Early in that year, while in Philadelphia, he suffered a stroke and was paralyzed. His son W.H.Hoffman went to Philadelphia and brought him home. However he never fully recovered. One day in April he went to bed and that was the last time he was on his feet. He died April 21, 1927 at age 75 at his home, 216 Bellefield Ave. He was buried in Allegheny Cemetery.



William F. Hoffman

Mr. Hoffman had been born within a few hundred feet of the establishment over which he later presided. Before coming with the Heeren brothers he had been in the insurance business with the old firm of Swearingen & McCandless. His father, Dr. Herman Hoffman was the first homeopathic physician to practice medicine in Pittsburgh and was one of the founders of the Homeopathic Hospital of Pittsburgh. Mr. W.F.Hoffman was a graduate of the old Western University, now the University of Pittsburgh.

The entire Heeren Bros. Co. establishment was closed for business until after the funeral.

H.H. AND W.H.HOFFMAN

Mr. H.H. and Mr. W.F.Hoffman apparently carried on the business until the stock market crash and the following depression took their toll.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE (1929)

On September 27, 1929 a Heeren Bros.Co. advertisement in the Jewelers' Circular gives some indication of impending trouble. It said: "Retail prices are strictly upheld at all times!"



Herman H.Hoffman

William H.Hoffman

It went on to say that this statement was being made at this time to correct erroneous rumors which had circulated in the trade.

DIAMOND STUDDED EYEGLASSES (1930)

Herman Hoffman tried to promote the idea of placing jewels in spectacles. He had a diamond studded set made and tried to make them popular. An article about them and the firm, complete with pictures, appeared in the press on April 18, 1930.

ENTIRE STOCK DISCOUNTED (1931)

On November 27, 1931 the firm offered its entire stock at discounts of 25 to 50 percent.

W.H. HOFFMAN DIES (1932)

Mr. William H. Hoffman, still a Vice President of the company, died at age 42 at his home, 214 Bellefield Avenue.

LAST AD (1932)

The last advertisement in the old scrapbook is dated 1934. No month is indicated.

DIE IMPRESSIONS

Fortunately a hard backed magazine holder containing some 1,370 die impressions survives. It is in the Carnegie Museum, Section of Coins and Medals. On its 45 large pages (10" x 15") are pasted the paper cuttings of impressions made from the dies. Each impression is numbered but the series is not complete, the numbers are not in all cases consecutively arranged, and many are missing. The lowest number is 208 and the highest 2614. The earliest date noted in any of the designs is 1895. Assuming that 2,614 dies were made since that date we are fortunate to have a fairly good record of almost 53% of them.

These 1,370 die impressions together with the 1,534 sketches in the old style book gives us over 2,900 examples of the work of this company of a bygone day.

Glenn A. Mooney

GENEALOGY OF THE HEEREN AND

HOFFMAN FAMILIES

Herman m (?)
 Hoffman : (?)
 (Pgh's 1st) : Hoffman
 (Homeo-) :
 (pathic) :
 (physician) :
 :
 :
 :

(?) m CARL : WILLIAM F. m (?) : OTTO m Adele : Dr. Charles
 Heeren WECKERLE : HEEREN : (?) : HEEREN Hoffman : Hoffman
 Weckerle (First) : (1841-1924) : Heeren : (Second) Heeren : (Hollywood)
 (partner) : (Founder) : : (Partner) : (Calif.)

(?) m Louise
 Demmler Heeren
 Demmler
 (Pgh.)

Alvina
 Heeren
 Nahmacher
 (Brooklyn)

WILLIAM F. m Olga
 HOFFMAN : Moesser
 (1852-1927) : Hoffman
 (Third) :
 (partner) :
 :
 :
 :

(?) m Walter F.
 (?) : Heeren
 Heeren : (Lived)
 : (with)
 : (father)
 : (at 4733)
 : (Center)
 : (Avenue.)
 : (Was with
 : (firm in)
 : (1924)

Anna m William H. Herman H.
 Satler : Hoffman Hoffman
 Hoffman : (Younger) (V.P.Opms)
 : (son.V.P.) (in 1924.)
 : (Manuf.in)
 : (1924.)
 : (Died Mar)
 : (1932 at)
 : (214 Bel-)
 : (lefield)
 : (Avenue.)

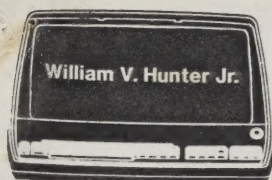
2 Daughters

Robert S.
 Hoffman

William H.
 Hoffman Jr.

CHRONOLOGY OF HEEREN BROS. CO.

- 1841 Aug. 8 William F. Heeren, founder, born in Egien, Germany.
- 1852 William F. Hoffman, later president of firm, born in Pittsburgh.
- 1860 W.F.Heeren, founder, comes to U.S. Aged 19. Resides in Philadelphia.
- 1862 W.F.Heeren moves to Pittsburgh. Forms partnership with brother-in-law Carl Weckerle.
- 1867 Firm begins "business service to the jewelry industry".
- 1870 W.F.Heeren forms partnership with brother Otto.
- 1871 W.F.Hoffman, aged 19, hired by firm. (Was brother of Otto's wife.)
- 1874 William F. Hoffman admitted to partnership.
Firm name changed to Heeren Brothers and Company.
- 1877 William F. Hoffman married Miss Olga Moesser.
- 1878 Stephen Foster medals struck at Pittsburgh Exposition.
- 1897 Iron wreath made for the "Iron Chancellor" Bismark.
- 1894 G.A.R. badges made from Civil War cannons.
- 1919 Partnership was dissolved. A corporation was formed.
William F.Heeren elected Chairman of the board of directors.
William F.Hoffman elected President.
Corporation name was Heeren Bros.Co.
- 1920 W.F.Heeren, founder, retired from active participation in firm.
- 1924 W.F.Hoffman relinquishes Presidency but remains a director.
His son, William H. Hoffman was Vice President of manufacturing.
Another son, Herman H. Hoffman was Vice President of operations.
- June Company picnic at Verona, Pa. at Duquesne Canoe Club. 100 attended.
- Dec 12 W.F.Heeren, founder, died. Aged 83, at his home, 4733 Center Avenue.
- 1927 Apr 21 W.F.Hoffman died. Aged 75, at his home, 216 Bellefield Avenue.
- 1929 Sep 27 Ad in Jewelers' Circular says "Retail prices are strictly upheld at all times."
- 1930 Apr 18 Herman H. Hoffman promotes diamond studded spectacles.
- 1931 Nov 27 Firm offers entire stock at discounts of 25 to 50 %.
- 1932 Mar William H. Hoffman died. Aged 42, at his home, 214 Bellefield Ave.
- 1934 Last advertisement in scrapbook.



WILLIAM V. HUNTER, JR. COMPUTER HARDWARE, PROGRAMMING,
AND SYSTEMS SERVICES

1151 Scorer Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15207

(412) 461-2237

Western Pennsylvania Numismatic Survey

Encased Items - List of Issuers

Joseph Abbott (-); 5300 Perry Highway,
Beer Distributor

Louis J. Adler & Co. Pgh., Pa.
Whiskies

Allegheny Valley Bank (1900-)

Amdur-Briskin Furniture Co. (=1957-1962); 5125 Penn Ave. (Garfield), Pgh. 15224
Furniture
Owners: Leonard Briskin and Amdur

Amon Motor (1934 -1/1/62; 8324 Ohio River Blvd., Pgh., 15202(1937-1962)
Owner: Joseph W. Amon. Became Amon Schuler Olds, Inc.

Auerbach Furniture Co. (-); Beaver Ave. & Nixon St., Pgh., Pa. 15233

Balkey's Home & Auto Supply (-); 14 N. Main St., (Sharpsburg)
Pgh., Pa. 15215
Owner: Carl S. Balkey

Bart's Tavern (-); 140 S. 18th St. +(South Side), Pgh., Pa. 15203

Better Supply Co. (-); 347 E. 8th Ave., Homestead, Pa. 15120

Braddock National Bank (-);

Braun (-); 500 Federal St., (Allegheny) Pgh., Pa.

M. R. Bretsnyder (=1923-1960); Homestead, Pa. 15120
Auto Dealer sold Maxwell thru Chrysler products at various 7th & 8th Ave sites.
Owner: M. R. Bretsnyder